

kingdom under Sobhuza I and Mswati and the various Ngoni States. Despite their common social and cultural origin these emergent polities had each its distinctive features. The special characteristics of Ngoni society are at least in part understandable as due to the differences in its social environment as compared with Zulu and Swazi. The Ngoni were migrants, whereas Zulu and Swazi were not. The Ngoni captured a large number of men and women of non-Ngoni origin who were assimilated into the Ngoni State as individuals, whereas for the most part the Zulu and Swazi States expanded by the incorporation of existing social groups as groups, not as individuals, and these groups, if not all Ngoni in origin, at least belonged to closely allied peoples.

Thus to set the Ngoni in proper perspective we must begin with a brief description of their Ngoni forebears. In the eighteenth century the Ngoni were grouped into a large number of small chiefdoms each containing a dominant agnatic lineage segment to which the chief belonged. Each chiefdom contained segments of other lineages, and most lineages had segments in a number of chiefdoms, one segment being dominant in its chiefdom. Lineages were exogamous, their members were graded in terms of primogeniture and the ranking of wives, and as a result of quarrels segments transferred their allegiance from one chief to another or even founded new chiefdoms. Most residential settlements were small, containing only the agnatic descendants of a living man, with their wives and children, and were divided into three sections or 'houses', led by the great, right- and left-hand wives of the polygynous head of the settlement. There were also larger homesteads containing the dwellings of chiefs and other members of the dominant lineage as well as those of many genealogically unrelated dependants. The chief was assisted by his agnatic kinsmen and by the heads of non-chiefly lineage segments and by other unrelated men whom he placed as lieutenants, or indunas, in charge of districts or responsible for specific administrative, judicial or military tasks. For fighting and hunting the men of the chiefdom were organized in divisions, each attached to a royal homestead. There was also an organization of youths into small age-sets, groupings of coevals who had been circumcised together.

At the turn of the century, with the emergence of large kingdoms, each containing many chiefdoms under the leadership of a king, the age-set system changed its form and the royal homesteads acquired greater significance. Circumcision was discontinued and the age-sets began to be organized on a national basis. Each age-set constituted a regiment in the national army, had its barracks

CHAPTER III

NGONI CULTURE

563 AMONG the mixed ethnic elements in the Ngoni kingdoms the ruling aristocracy were those whose ancestors were of Swazi and trans-Zambesi origin, and whose clan descent names established them as belonging to the true Ngoni group. The families with these clan names formed also a social aristocracy in the villages where they lived, in the areas of the chiefs and *ahmuzana*, and in the Ngoni kingdoms. This social status, established primarily by the clan name, was visible in the position of the huts in the village, arranged at the head of the kraal; in the leading role played by the senior members of these families on all ceremonial occasions; and in the practice of a number of customs which were defined as Ngoni. Ngoni culture, as seen in social and ritual life, was a series of interwoven patterns of social organization and social behaviour. We shall outline these patterns here in order to bring together many of the forms and practices described in the rest of the book. In a more homogeneous society it would have been possible to find in these patterns a consistent and clearly defined culture. Yet one of the main problems in studying Ngoni culture in the 1930's was that there were many variations of each pattern and the anthropologist was all the time trying to find out what degree of cultural conformity existed among the Ngoni aristocracy. Of the different aspects of culture reviewed in this chapter, the ritual pattern was the one most consistently followed, and it was the one in which the Ngoni social aristocracy most clearly demonstrated that they had a distinctive common culture which was found in both kingdoms and in the secession states.

(a) Kinship pattern

611 Like the South-eastern Bantu from whom they came the Ngoni were patrilineal in descent and inheritance. Marriage was negotiated by go-
 583 between and concluded through the handing over of cattle, and the term *lobola* was used for the cattle exchanged in this form of marriage. An Ngoni woman married by this form was known as *mlobekazi*. A
 593 strict interpretation in the courts was given to this form of marriage as it affected the ownership and custody of the children. The children of
 591 a *lobola* marriage contract belonged to their father and could be claimed by him if the marriage broke up, or on the death of their mother. Traditionally, virilocal residence was an Ngoni custom, and it was supported by the house system whereby the male members of each house
 592 formed a group with economic interests in common through the joint ownership of the cattle in the name of the house. A widespread variant

THE PARAMOUNT

65

Dr. Kuper described the Swazi king making his own capital, but referred also to the existence of several royal villages where the wives of the reigning king lived.¹ The Ngoni system of one royal village which went out from the former royal village resulted in a series of social groups, based on residence, which were related to past Paramounts and their widows and to present Paramounts and their wives. The diagram in Chapter III of Part I shows a very much simplified form of the component parts of a new royal village and their relationship illustrated by the siting of the huts.

643
361
644

The following text was given by an elderly widow of a grandson of Zwangendaba, in the head village of Chief Mperembe in the northern kingdom.

¶ When a new village, *hampulu*, was built the *indankulu* was first erected and then followed all the other huts of the *inkosi* in order. Those huts which belonged to the *indankulu* took the right-hand side facing the kraal. The second house took the left-hand side, and all huts belonging to this one followed it. Such huts could be counted as belonging to the *indankulu* and the second house by the cattle that were taken from such houses. To marry a new wife, if the *inkosi* took cattle from the right-hand house that new wife would belong there. All the huts of each house of the *inkosi* were built at the back of the hut of the owner of that house.

When erecting huts, those of the *isinduna* came next and were built next to those of the *inkosi*. After that they built their own according to their *isigama* or divisions.

All the huts at the back of the *indankulu* and behind the other huts were called *igodile*. Huts near the gate of the kraal at the left were called *huts cikhulu*.

This text brings out the fact that each new royal village had three main elements in it: the mothers of the Paramount, his wives, and the *isinduna* and their families. The Paramount was always accompanied to his new village by one or more wives of his father, *shalandolosa mawuna* (to keep the son). One of these was usually his own mother and she occupied the *indankulu*. The text points out that the big wife of the Paramount was on the right of the *indankulu*, and closely associated with its owner, the Paramount's mother.

[592]
644]

There was no fixed rule for the number of *isinduna* in charge of the houses of the Paramount's mothers and wives. When the Ngoni kingdoms were established in Nyasaland, the royal villages were very large and the divisions of the village, called in the text *isigama*, were small hamlets. Each division was generally identified with a house, and in that case the *induna* in charge of the house was also in charge of the division. The original composition of royal villages could only be reconstructed by tracing the relationships of separate villages in the 1930's to their former parent village. This will be illustrated in the next chapter on the

¹ Kuper, H. op. cit. p. 41.

THE NGONI POLITICAL SYSTEM

644 66

643 royal women. In the royal villages in the 1930's there was one big
361 *isiduna* and several lesser ones whose position and functions will be described in Chapter IV.

643 This 'going out' of the new Paramount's village, leaving the former
554 Paramount's village as the *gogo* village, brought about some re-distribu-
644 tion of authority, prestige and material goods. It gave the new Para-
mount his own village, always to be known as his, even after his death.
His village became the focal meeting-place for the territory and for the
court and territorial officials who surrounded the Paramount; and it was
to the new royal village that the *alumuzana* in pre-European days came
frequently to visit the Paramount and report to him on conditions in
their areas. His moving out of the *gogo* village, on the other hand, gave
his brothers who stayed there, and especially those of the *gogo* house,
more freedom and authority within that village as well as responsibility
for the conduct of all ritual matters relating to the kingdom. The Para-
mount's big wife had to take her place as the leading woman in the new
village and to order the affairs of the wives attached to her house in con-
sultation with the Paramount's mother. Cattle, beer and food for the
royal household became the concern of the new village, and the *isiduna*
and the royal women had to plan and manage the economy of a capital
where political interests converged and where visitors and hangers-on
were constantly turning up.

643 The following text by Chief Mtwalo Jere in Mzimba district, helped
644 by Cibambo's older brother, describes the daily routine of the Para-
mount and his royal village as they had known it in their youth before
512 the coming of the Europeans:

¶ The *inkosi* had to wash very early before the people came to see him. The *ingceko* was the servant who took care of washing the *inkosi*. He had to go with the *inkosi* to the bush and hide the faeces to prevent any bad person from getting the faeces. The *ingceko* was anyone whom the *inkosi* called for this, and must be one who walks well with the *inkosi*.

Before leaving his house to go to the kraal the *inkosi* had to eat a little porridge. When he went to the kraal a calabash of beer was brought to him. When any beer was brought to the *inkosi*, the *ingceko* tasted it first to see if it was good. The *inkosi* asked 'Is it good beer?' and the *ingceko* said 'Yes *inkosi*' and gave it to the *inkosi* to drink. When the *inkosi* took snuff the big *alumuzana* could beg from him. The other *amadada* could only touch their noses. Then the *inkosi* knew they were begging snuff from him. Where the *inkosi* sat a mat was spread, and on it was laid a leopard- or a lion-skin. This was called 'the chair of the *inkosi*'. On arrival the big *alumuzana* went straight into the kraal to where the *inkosi* sat and greeted him 'Dayets', and sat down in front of him.

The *inkosi* could not eat porridge except that cooked by his own wives. In his own hut he ate alone with one wife to serve him. His mothers also came with food every day. He ate twice in his own hut, early and late, and once in the kraal. When he ate in the kraal all could see him. He could

CHAPTER III

HOUSES

361
171
823 WRITING of the social organization of the northern Nguni among the South-eastern Bantu, Mrs. Hoernlé¹ referred to three divisions of the typical village: the *indlunkulu* section where the principal hut was that of the mistress of the village; the *ikhohlo* section on the left-hand side of this hut, and the *inqadi* section on the right. The terminology used by the northern Nguni expressed right and left hand from the point of view of someone looking up from the gate of the kraal. I found that among the Ngoni they used right and left the other way as if the person were at the top of the kraal looking down at the gate, and I have adopted their usage.

171
361
554 Ngoni villages, which were royal villages or the head villages of Swazi and trans-Zambesi clans, also had a tripartite division into houses related to leading women, as we saw in the village plan in Chapter III of Part I, but there was a major difference between them and the northern Nguni grouping described by Mrs. Hoernlé. In Ngoni villages the *indlunkulu*, the hut at the head of the kraal, was occupied by the mother of the owner of the village, who had 'come out' with him from his father's village. In the right-hand section of the huts round the kraal was the hut of the owner's big wife, and on the left the hut of his next important wife. These three huts, representing three houses, were the focal points of the main divisions of the village. In fact in most villages the owner of the *indlunkulu* had the huts of other widows of her late husband beside her on each side, and the *cigodlo*, or section where the sons of the owner of the village lived, spread over a wide area behind the *indlunkulu* and behind the huts of the two chief wives. The plan used in Chapter III of Part I was necessarily simplified in order to bring out the main points. The grouping of huts in typical Ngoni villages showed varying degrees of elaboration, and it was not always easy at first to trace their connexions with the houses.

● 592
571 Houses in the Ngoni kingdoms could be considered as divisions of the village, though they did not always cover all the divisions. If we look at the membership of a house, as it was illustrated in a typical Ngoni village, it is clear that it had in it three elements connected by ties of kinship, affinity or association with the owner of the house, who was either a wife or a mother of the male owner of the village. The kinship group related to the *indlunkulu* comprised the male owner of the village, his mother and classificatory mothers with his brothers who had joined him. In the big house and in the second house of his wives the kinship

¹ op. cit. p. 83.

HOUSES

123

group consisted of himself and the mother and her children, including her daughters only until they married.

The affinal element in a house consisted of the other wives associated with the owner of the house as co-wives, and the wives of the sons of the owner. Both the kinship group and the affinal group were bound together by their rights in the cattle of the herd which was known as 'the cattle of the house of X'. From that herd were taken cattle for the *lobola* of the wives married after the house was founded, and for the wives of the sons and adopted sons of the house. Into that herd came the cattle received for the marriages of the daughters belonging to the house and the gift cattle sent to wives by their fathers after marriage. When the *lobola* had been fully paid up for a daughter of the house, then her relationship with it ceased and she was thenceforth known as belonging to her husband's mother's house.

Associated with the house in the villages of the Paramounts, the chiefs and the leading *alumuzana* were two other groups of people. One was the *induna* appointed 'to take care of the house' and his family. In the 1930's the *induna* was in charge of the cattle and of the many activities connected with the house, including the organization of male labour in hut-building, in kraal construction and in cultivation; he was consulted by the male members of the house about the selling of cattle and the use of the goods accumulated in the house. The other group associated with the house in pre-European days consisted of captives taken in war and allocated to the house who worked as labourers. The servants who worked for a house in the 1930's assisted with cooking, beer-making and minding the children, and they had huts near that of the owner of the house to which they belonged, placed on the right- or left-hand side of the kraal according to their affiliation with the big house or the second house. Informants said that in the past such association with a house included giving a beast from the herd of the house for the marriage of a servant. The *induna*, through the marriage of his daughters, built up his own herd, which he frequently kept at first with the cattle of the house in the main kraal, later building his own kraal.

A new house began when a man married his big wife. Although at first he built her a hut at the back of his mother's hut in his father's village, as soon as he moved out to his new village after his father's death, the big wife's hut had the next most important site in the kraal after that of the *indlunkulu*, and the second wife had the third place of importance. In some of the larger villages of the central kingdom, the custom of moving out into a new village after the death of the former owner had been given up, partly because of pressure on the land. The house grouping in relation to the siting of huts then became very complex, but the pattern was nevertheless discernible. The two sections under the big house and the *gogo* house, which had formerly divided into two villages, continued to exist together, and at Mcakhatha this dual

571
592592
585
571

[591]

592
571
357

[527]

361
591
592

[768]

361
592

361
592 pattern covered two generations including the houses of the former chief and the reigning one.

The houses served several purposes in the organization of village life on the one hand, and on the other, provided an important instrument for regulating succession and inheritance, and for carrying out traditional ceremonies and ritual. It was the eldest son of the second house who would, if the *lusungulu* practice was followed, remain behind with the *gogo* village; and he was responsible for conducting traditional ritual and was expected to be able to carry out ceremonial procedure correctly. This was the main function of the *gogo* village and of the man who was head of the male members of the *gogo* house. The corresponding head of the male members of the big house was the owner of the village, and it was his eldest son by his first wife who would normally succeed him as chief or *mulumuzana*. The members of each house had a stake in the property of that house, particularly in the herd of cattle owned by it, and in any goods, such as cloth, bought by the sale of the cattle of the house. The house united the male members who belonged to it through this common ownership of cattle. In Chapter II of Part IV we shall examine further this aspect of belonging to a house.

554
592
562 In the organization of village life in villages belonging to chiefs or *alumuzana* the houses established the status of the wives of the owner of the village, and the status of those of his mothers who had come with him. His mother in the *indlunkulu* hut ranked first among her co-widows. The big wife came next, and the wife of the second house after her. Wives attached to the big house ranked above those attached to the second house.

571
592
627
562 The houses fulfilled their most prominent role in the day-to-day activities of the households associated with them. It was in these daily affairs and in planning for future events that the house organization provided the chief channels of authority. The exercise of this authority ranged from instruction in household tasks and emphasis on good standards of housekeeping to settling minor disputes arising from marital quarrels over property and over the custody of children. These minor cases could be settled out of court if the senior women showed that they knew how to listen to complaints and give advice which was accepted, with the result that good relations were restored. The main topics of discussion among the senior women on the verandah of the *indlunkulu* were the ingredients of these minor quarrels and disputes. If, by judicious handling, they could keep the cases out of court, they knew, and so did the village, that their authority was enhanced and their prestige more firmly established.

571
592
562 The authority of senior women was further reinforced through their organization of women's labour in household work and in cultivation. This authority in domestic affairs covered a woman's own household and the women and girls attached to it as household servants, the

HOUSES

135

households of her co-wives who were junior to her in the house, and the households of her sons' wives. These women also decided when to undertake certain work in cultivation or in harvesting crops, when to brew beer, when to re-polish the floors of huts and the sitting place in front of the huts, when to replenish the stock of cloth, ornaments and beads, baskets and mats, which were part of the wealth of the house. Other occasions for the exercise of authority were attending and superintending women's confinements and the private puberty rite of the girls, advising on matters of health, and supervising the training of children.

All these activities of the owners of the houses were so much part of the day-to-day life of a village that they could pass almost unnoticed unless a detailed analysis were made. The position and authority of owners of houses was, however, immediately evident on ceremonial occasions. These included the pre-marriage ceremony of *umsindo*, which was abandoned after the Europeans came; the series of visits and exchanges leading up to the marriage ceremony, *mtimba*; brewing beer on a number of occasions, for dancing *ngoma* and *ligubo*, for funerals and subsequent ritual shaving, or for entertaining important visitors whose coming was expected so that beer could be prepared in advance. On all such occasions, the courtyard surrounding the *indlunkulu* was a scene of great activity. Men put on their war-dance equipment there; the beer pots were assembled there; meat and blood for feasts were cooked there, while the less important maize porridge (*nsima*) was cooked in subordinate households. From the courtyard of the *indlunkulu* a procession of the *manina* (senior women) led by the owner of the house went out to greet visitors, to go to the beer drink, to take part in the dances, and to perform the ritual connected with births, deaths and marriages.

MARRIAGE IN NGONI SOCIETY

Earlier in this chapter it was said that a new house derived from the marriage of a leading man to his big wife. Since marriage was so closely linked with the continuance and development of houses, and since a new wife when married separated from her own mother's house and became a member of her husband's mother's house, I have included a discussion of marriage in this chapter on houses.

There were three main principles in Ngoni marriage. It was a binding contract sealed by the exchange of cattle; it established succession in the male line; it formed a link between leading Swazi clans. When we examine in detail the organization of Ngoni marriage we see that its objectives were to build up a series of inter-clan and inter-family relationships. These began with inter-marriage between the leading Swazi clans, in order to strengthen the political and social relationships within that inner circle of Ngoni society. The political allegiance of leading individuals from clans of non-Swazi origin was strengthened by marriage

562

571

592

592

554

571

[178]

581

182

621
593

break up into smaller villages, and there were on the whole more villages in the north said to be *wabanja limodzi* (of one family) than among the central Ngoni. On the other hand, the *lusungulu* pattern of village division had almost disappeared among the central Ngoni.

591
592
[361]

A man on his first marriage built a hut for his wife behind his mother's hut, where his brothers by the same mother or by mothers of the same house also built. The family grouping by residence was therefore determined by house affiliation. Associated with this residential group based on kinship, there were the residences of the *induna* and his family which had separate alignments on a kinship basis, though for certain common purposes they combined with the family groups related to the house by kinship. The children of the families belonging to the house and the children of the *induna* who took care of it began to intermarry when the prohibitions on marriage within the village ceased to operate. In this way kinship bonds were created within a group which formerly had only residence and certain activities in common, and this process was recognizable in a number of the larger villages, especially in the central kingdom.

593

Within the different types of family groups determined by their residential basis there were certain outstanding relationships between members of the same family. The most important of these was that between father and children; the father, as the biological parent and also the symbol of authority, was the focus of honour and respect, and the one who helped his children when they were in need. The relation between the father and his children among the Ngoni was always a balance between affection and care, and respect and authority. The ideal pattern of a father, as described by informants, included all these elements and also wisdom. This concept of the father relationship was extended to the head of a *banja*, to the headman of a village or a section of a village, to a *mulumuzana* in charge of an area, to a chief, and to the Paramount himself. The Ngoni greeting to all older men, and the most respectful form of address to a man of any seniority, was *baba*, father, or its Nyanja equivalent *bambo*.

[592]

The mother, on the other hand, had a more limited relationship within the family circle. To her own children and to the children of her co-wives, especially of her house, she was the provider of food, and the affectionate 'cherisher'¹ of young children; but she was also treated with respect and, when she reached some seniority, she had considerable authority over her daughters and her younger co-wives. She could never compete, however, with the sisters of her husband or with his mothers, who expected to exercise authority over her children and to arrange for the ceremonies connected with birth, puberty, and marriage.

[591
184]

In villages where virilocal residence was the rule, the husband's sisters were married elsewhere and were only present in the village during

¹ *hulova*, lit. to cherish, is the word used for bringing up children.

NGONI FAMILY STRUCTURE

137

what took place, informants were anxious to point this out. They also admitted that its successful carrying out depended on several factors which no longer operated. The former Ngoni households with a number of servants and nursemaids were only to be found in the families of the Paramount and subordinate chiefs. The rigid separation of the girl from her own family at marriage was no longer usual in the central kingdom where Ngoni marriages often took place in the same village, and where daughters of important men stayed in their fathers' villages at marriage instead of leaving.

In Ngoni households family sleeping and eating arrangements depended not upon the small individual family but on the extended family group and on the boys' dormitory (*laweni*). As a general rule small children slept with their mother in her hut, but when her husband was sleeping with her it was considered wrong to have any but very young children in the hut. Boys up to the age of seven, when they went to the *laweni*, and girls up to their marriage, usually slept in the hut of a mother or a widowed sister of their father.

Each wife, after she had been 'shown the hearth-stones', had a granary built for her by her husband or her husband's brothers where she stored grain. On the rafters in her hut, and in pots and jars on the enclosed verandah, and in pits dug under the eaves, she stored other foodstuffs, such as chillies, beans and sweet potatoes. From these supplies, supplemented by fresh 'relish' from the gardens or bush, she cooked daily meals which she served to her husband, and which her younger sons in the *laweni* fetched to eat there, while she ate with her young children. Her husband's meals and the older boys' meals were taken in company with the male members of his kinship group and other villagers at the men's meeting-place by the gate of the kraal. His wife sent his food by a child in a covered basket with the small pot of relish on top. The publicity of the men's eating habits made them critical among their fellows of their wives' cooking, and this was a strong incentive among Ngoni wives to maintain a high standard of cooking. In addition to sending food to her husband, an Ngoni wife was expected to send a basket of food now and then to her father-in-law, or to any of her brothers-in-law who had assisted her to mend a roof or build a granary.

Within a wife's hut, not only food but other possessions, both personal and household, were stored. Clothes for daily and ceremonial use; mats for sleeping on and for drying grain; pots for water, cooking, and beer-brewing; ornamental jars for storing beans; baskets for carrying grain; food baskets embroidered with beads—the Ngoni wife of good family expected to possess all these and to keep them carefully. Many of them she brought with her on her marriage or had given her later as presents by her own parents and family, in order that she might not appear poor or of low rank among her husband's people. For the same reason, she

NGONI SOCIETY

138

342

356

593

was instructed before marriage how to keep these household possessions in good repair, and how to smear the floor and walls of the hut with cowdung so that they presented the shining surface typical of Ngoni buildings.

162

585

595

184

The tables which follow show the total population of three villages in each kingdom at the time they were visited in 1938 and 1939, including such data as the number of widows, of plural marriages, of wives for whom *lobola* was given, and the number of men away at work.

	1 Huts	2 Men	3 Women	4 Children	5 Total	6 Men away	7 Widows	8 Plural marriages	9 Lobola marriages
<i>Northern kingdom</i>									
Eswazini	23	10	21	28	59	10	4	4	21
Endindeni	15	9	21	21	51	4	1	4	15
Eluhangeni	37	19	36	54	109	11	4	5	32
<i>Central kingdom</i>									
Cinkwita	39	22	39	54	115	13	5	4	2
Mangozo	60	41	65	78	184	9	18	2	4
Makhattha	122	71	112	68	251	30	16	14	12

Earlier in this chapter reference was made to the patterns of residential grouping on a kinship basis, which had evolved from the mixed tribal groups in the very large villages of pre-European days. The choice of these six villages as examples was made mainly on the grounds that they had a considerable proportion of members of Swazi or trans-Zambesi clans and therefore illustrated the traditional Ngoni pattern of kinship grouping. The northern kingdom villages showed the *lusungulu* and *gogo* pattern still extant. It had disappeared in the central kingdom villages with the result that the villages were much larger, and included groups based on house affiliation which would have been divided into separate villages in the north. On the other hand the sub-division of a village in the central kingdom into *banja* was not found in the north.

592

614

622

631

The data concerning these villages have been analysed to illustrate the households associated with the chief man in the leading clan in the village. These households were those of his wives, his mothers, his brothers, his sons, sisters and daughters. In the north this man was in one case a *mulumuxana*, in another a son of a great war *induna*, and in the third the head of a collateral branch of the royal clan. In the central kingdom the chief man in one was a *mulumuxana*, in another a grandson of a great war *induna*, and in the third the head of the clan of the royal shadow. The proportion of households belonging to the leading clan was much higher in the smaller villages of the north than in the rest, since they were approximating to a one-family village.

NGONI FAMILY STRUCTURE

139

	Households ¹	Total	Leading clan	
<i>Northern Ngoniland</i>				
Eswazini		23	13	592
Endindeni		15	12	614
Eluhangeni		37	21	622
				631
<i>Central Ngoniland</i>				
Cinkwita		39	18	
Mangoso		60	26	
Mcakhatha		122	37	

The proportion of persons of Swazi and trans-Zambesi clans in the central kingdom to the total population was lower than in the north. The figures given here, however, do not show the total number of persons of Swazi and trans-Zambesi clans, but only the households related on a kinship basis with the leading clan head.

Eswazini and Endindeni were both built in traditional Ngoni style in horse-shoe formation round a single kraal, with the *indlunkulu* at the head of the kraal, and a recognized right-hand and left-hand grouping. Eswazini had become the head village of the Sibande clan since its owner, Samson Sibande, on his father's death had gone out from his father's village and made this his *lusungulu* village. His big wife, of the royal clan, was in the *indlunkulu* to which she had succeeded on the death of his mother, and there was another wife on the right and left hand. Of the older generation there was only one widow of his father, belonging to the same house as his mother. Of his generation there were five brothers, one of the same mother as Samson, and four sons of the surviving widow of his father. There was also the widow of a dead brother by the same mother. Two sisters of Samson were in the village, one married to the *induna* of his mother's house, whose family lived on the right-hand side of the kraal, and one a deserted widow who had returned to her brother's protection. All the village was one house, that of Samson's owa mother.

Endindeni was a *gogo* village owned by Zibekere Makwakwa who was the son of a famous war *induna* and was of the *gogo* house of his father. His brother, who was the son of the big house, had moved out to his own village. The village was composed entirely of his family with the exception of an age mate with whom he had an *ubale* relationship, who lived with his two wives on the left-hand side of the kraal. Zibekere's big wife was in the *indlunkulu* to which she had succeeded on the death of his own mother, and his second wife was also of her house. Of the older generation there was one widow of his father, and one widow of his father's brother; of his own generation, one younger brother of the same mother. There were four sons of his big wife and two of his second

¹ In all six villages the total number of households included two or more *lameni*.

184 wife. The village with its single kraal was 'of one house', and it was
 592 widely known as a good village by Ngoni standards, because, as the
 621 local people said, 'all the men are Makwakwa men'.

Eluhangeni was a *gogo* village where the spirit of Mtenje Jere, the son of a brother of Zwangendaba, was guarded. The kinship group of Mwanamdoko Jere, the owner of the village, were all of one house, that of his mother who was dead. Her place in the *indlunkulu* had been taken by his big wife who also inherited the guardianship of the spirit of Mtenje. There was one widow of his father in the village, but she had become a Christian and therefore could not guard the spirit. Mwanamdoko had two wives, and three widows of his brothers by the same mother were also in the village. One brother by another mother was the only one of his generation still alive and he had two sons and two grandsons living in the *cigodlo* behind the *indlunkulu*. All Mwanamdoko's family were grouped round one kraal. There were two other kraals with family groups round them in the village, one belonging to the *induna* of his dead mother, and one to an age mate who had been in his regiment. The *induna's* group belonged to the same house as Mwanamdoko, but the pattern of the three distinct groups each with its own kraal was more like that of the *banja* in the central kingdom.

184 In the central kingdom the relationships of the various groups in a
 563 village followed a different pattern from that in the north. Instead of
 592 the *lusungulu* and *gogo* characteristics where the family groups were
 621 integrated into houses, the southern pattern was that of a conquered village with the Ngoni element superimposed. In Cinkwita and in Makhatha the village headman and his family group had originally been conquered, then established as an outlying village, and finally chosen for the permanent settlement of a family group belonging to an Ngoni clan when they left the royal village after it broke up. In Cinkwita there were three kraals associated with three *banja*. Two of the *banja* belonged to kinship groups of Ntumba clans, and the head of one was known as the headman of the village. The head of the *banja* of Cinkwita Nda, the Ngoni clan group, was his eldest son Wilkinson, whose wife was of a leading Swazi clan, the Magwagwa. His family group consisted of his wife, two sons and three daughters; a brother and his two daughters; the widow of a dead brother and his two sons and a daughter; three sisters, one of whom had married the brother of the village headman and one who was a widow; and a widowed sister of his father. This family grouping expressed in terms of households illustrates what has already been referred to several times, namely the tendency of the heads of leading Ngoni families in the central kingdom to keep, in addition to their sons, their sisters and daughters in the village after marriage, even when *lobola* had been given. It also illustrates the comparatively small number of plural marriages in the south among the younger men.

NGONI FAMILY STRUCTURE

141

Mangoso, as its name suggests, was the head village of the Ngozo clan. It had been originally settled by Ngwazi Ngozo who brought with him two family groups of Ntumba clans who had been with him in Songea. These two Ntumba family groups each formed a *banja*, and one had a kraal. The other two *banja* belonged to two elderly Ngozo brothers, sons of Ngwazi and of the same house, who had one kraal between them. The senior of these, Mbiri Ngozo, had in his *banja* a widow of his father, not his own mother, and nine widows of a dead older brother; his own wife, two sons, two daughters, three grandsons and three granddaughters; and his sister. The *banja* of Cinyama Ngozo included two widows of another brother; his own wife, two sons, two daughters, one grandson and one granddaughter. The two brothers between them had to support eleven widows of dead brothers.

Mcakhatha had a dual foundation. The village site was originally one of the outlying villages of the section known as Ziyembe. It was also the head village of the Nzunga clan. Three of the five *banja* into which the village was divided belonged to Ntumba family groups, and the head of one of these was known as the headman of the village. Of the two *banja* belonging to the Nzunga clan, one was a *gogo banja*, the other that of the ruling chief who was a Sub-Native Authority.¹ Within the *gogo banja* was the house of Bambo Manga in whose hut the spirit of Mputa was guarded. Two other houses in the *gogo banja* were associated with the guardianship of the spirits of the grandfather and father of the ruling chief. There was therefore a house and a *banja* formation existing together, in which the *banja* predominated. The two Nzunga *banja* consisted of two family groups, one associated with the ruling chief and one with his paternal uncle in charge of the *gogo* section. The chief's *banja* included his own five wives, one sister and two brothers by the same mother, and two sisters and four brothers by other mothers. The *banja* of the head of the *gogo* section included his own five wives and two widows whom he had inherited from the former chief, his older brother; three brothers and two sisters by other mothers; three of his sons. It also included a widow of his father, and nine widows of his dead brother who had not been inherited; and the households of Bambo Manga and her daughter and granddaughter for whom the father of the ruling chief had assumed responsibility. The Ngoni family pattern of this village was more complex than that of Cinkwita or Mangozo because of the clearly marked *gogo* section existing alongside that of the ruling chief. It showed, however, the general characteristics of Ngoni family grouping in the central kingdom, keeping sisters and daughters in the village after marriage while retaining responsibility for widows of fathers and brothers. There were three Nzunga kraals, two in the *gogo banja* and one in the chief's *banja*, but the cattle were always referred to

¹ In northern Ngoniland the ruling chief would have moved out of this village on his father's death, leaving the *gogo banja* as the *gogo* village.

184
592
621
[617]

[617]

- 184 as belonging to the houses. The relatively large number of cattle and
 592 the high ranking of the Nzunga clan accounted for the number of
 621 lobola marriages.

Family structure in individual and group life

- 554 As individuals and in family groups members of leading Ngoni clans
 565 claimed and exercised leadership in their villages. The leading families
 614 in the area of a *mulumuzana* owning a head village, and the small Ngoni
 621 family groups in a larger non-Ngoni setting, all expected and received
 [557] 'honour' (*ulemu*). The tendency in the central kingdom to marry up, and
 in the northern kingdom to marry into the clan of the mother if it were
 a high-ranking one, emphasized the importance attached to the rank
 and prestige of certain clans. This attitude towards family prestige was
 more noticeable in the central kingdom where individuals were quick
 to announce who was their mother or wife if that information would
 enhance their reputation.

The leadership of high-ranking families was not only a matter of claiming prestige. It carried with it, on the male and the female side, responsibility for regulating the affairs of the village and the house and the *banja*. Quarrels had to be composed, if possible before they came to court, troubles over deserted wives looked into, provision made for hospitality and for keeping the village premises in order. Informants emphasized again and again that in Ngoni villages where many men and women were of Swazi clans, order and cleanliness were to be expected. This was not always the case, but it was strikingly illustrated in two of the villages referred to in this chapter—Endindeni in the northern and Mangozi in the central kingdom.

- [470] In day-to-day village affairs much mutual help was given by members of Ngoni families to each other, especially by the men to widowed mothers and sisters, and by the husband's brothers to wives whose husbands were away at work. The dislocation caused to the village economy by the emigration of males called for considerable organization on the part of those who were left. Ngoni male leaders of families and heads of a *banja*, and the women heads of the houses, all had to include the needs of these 'deserted' women in their own planning. In the northern kingdom, in spite of its relative poverty, better care was taken of wives whose husbands were away because the strong virilocal tradition emphasized this type of help.

- 867 In rearing and training children the Ngoni family structure and relationships provided direction and responsibility. We shall discuss in the next chapter on age sets the significance of birth and puberty ceremonies in Ngoni life. More significant, however, than any ceremony was the continuous provision for the training of children, adolescents and young adults in correct behaviour. This duty fell on the women as far as young children and girls were concerned, and on the men for the

NGONILAND AND THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN IT

woman had her home. The other was the 'gate' of the kraal^{62/} at the opposite end of the enclosure to the 'big house'. The name by which this 'gate' was known applied also to the [417] space on each side of the gap in the kraal fence through which the cattle went out and came in—a gap which was closed at night with heavy poles. Here at the gate the men^[512] of the village sat by day, ate their meals brought to them by children from their wives' huts, talked, received strangers, pursued their crafts, and supervised the return of the cattle in the evenings.

In and around the main huts within the tall reed fences, ³⁴² the life of a Ngoni household went on. Some of the huts were rectangular, others round. All had a veranda built up above the ground-level and shaded by the house roof. The back parts of the veranda were often enclosed with mats to make additional storage space. In old Ngoni households the open space around the hut was kept swept and mudded and polished like a floor, so that people could sit there in comfort and cleanliness as well as on the veranda. Near the house ³⁵¹ was one or more little reed platforms about five feet above the ground, where kitchen utensils, gourds and vegetables ⁴¹⁷ were laid to dry, and which were used to sit under as shelter from the sun in the hot months. Large and small wooden ⁴¹⁵ pounding mortars and poles, clay pots of every size and ³⁵² shape, mats for sleeping and for drying grain, baskets for many purposes, wooden food trays and spoons, gourds of several shapes, formed the traditional household equipment always to be seen outside and around the hut, as well as inside.

In each household, within the main hut, there were two ³⁵³ places of particular significance. One was by the two main ⁵⁹² door-posts at the entrance. These posts with the hollow for ^[354] the fireplace in the centre of the floor divided the hut into a right-hand and left-hand side—the men's side and the

¹ and ² A short list of the vernacular terms for some these common Ngoni place-names is given at end of the book.

CHILDREN OF THEIR FATHERS

- 353 women's. For all ceremonies the men sat on the right side,
 ● 592 and the women on the left, the place of honour for the
 [562] leading man and woman being by the main door-posts. No
 young man or woman ever thought of sitting near them.
 The other place of significance lay between the fire and the
 back of the hut on the right-hand side; it was known as the
 [778] 'place of the spirits', the 'ancestors' corner', where the
 [769] baskets and spears and other ritual objects were kept which
 were used in the ancestral cult. Only the owner of the hut or
 those taking part in the ritual could approach this corner.

In this land, into the cultural pattern of Ngoni village
 and household life, the Ngoni children were born. In such
 villages and homes they passed their earlier years, and grew
 from boys and girls to young adults.

The Ngoni kingdoms

- 642 When the Ngoni made parts of Nyasaland their homeland
 they set up conquest states on the pattern which they had
 been familiar with in southern Africa. Where they settled,
 [721] they either conquered the local peoples who lived in that
 [648] area, or accepted their submission. Until the British ad-
 ministration was established the Ngoni carried on wars and
 raids against neighbouring peoples to enlarge the boundaries
 of their kingdoms. As a conquest state, similar to that of the
 [162] Ndebele in Southern Rhodesia, the population of the Ngoni
 kingdoms was of mixed origin, some whose ancestors came
 from Natal, some from the territories passed through on
 their northward march, and some from Nyasaland itself.

- The kingdoms were organized on a centralized pattern
 [643] with the Paramount Chief as supreme ruler and subordinate
 chiefs under him. The Ngoni code of law operated in the
 [671] courts of the chiefs, and, as they proudly said, 'there was
 [692] one law for all people'. Military service was required from
 [702] all young men, and each territorial chief had to bring his
 [681] quota of warriors to the Paramount's village when a war
 summons went out. Military service, obedience to the law,
 000

NGONILAND AND THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN IT
 recognition of the Paramount's supremacy were therefore 182
 the main traditional forces uniting the mixed populations
 in the kingdoms.

Ngoni society

Although all people living in the Ngoni kingdoms were 641
 subjects of the Paramount, only those who could trace their
 descent from families who crossed the Zambezi River were
 recognized as 'true Ngoni'. Four main characteristics marked
 off this true Ngoni group from the rest. The first was their
 clan name, giving them an authentic origin south of the 614
 Zambezi. The second was a marriage contract sealed by
 handing over cattle, which established the offspring as 588
 'children of their fathers', for, as they said, 'where the
 children are, the cattle are not'. The third was patrilineal 611
 descent and inheritance through the male line, and patri- 428
 local residence at marriage, so that the wife came as a 591
 'stranger' to her husband's people and village. The fourth
 was membership of a 'house', the social group of male 592
 members of Ngoni families with their wives and children
 round a leading woman. Everyone was born into a 'house'
 and the men remained in it for life, the women until their
 marriage. For special reasons children could be adopted 597
 into another house than the one into which they were born.

In a few of the smaller villages of North Nyasaland, con- 621
 sisting of ten to fifteen huts, all the men were true Ngoni, 184
 descendants of one or more former warriors in the same 701
 regiment, who had chosen to set up their own villages after
 the British had taken over the country. In such villages the
 cultural pattern of Ngoni life could be seen clearly, but they
 were not typical of the Ngoni kingdoms. There was always
 a mixture of peoples in the larger villages, dominated by a 563
 group of true Ngoni families.

This group of true Ngoni families were the social and 186
 cultural aristocracy of these villages. They considered them- 563
 selves superior to and distinct from the other ethnic elements 621

CHILDREN OF THEIR FATHERS

105 senior men who related to me historical events, family genea-
621 logies, war-songs and other Ngoni traditional knowledge,
including the ideas and methods of bringing up Ngoni children. In the evenings the schoolboys gathered by my hut to practise their English, to discuss their school work and their plans for the future. The tsetse menace had for some time been threatening the cattle and losses were considerable. The boys wanted above all to emigrate and find work so that they could earn money to send home to their fathers to buy more cattle, pay taxes, buy clothes, guns and ammunition, for it was lion country.

[124] Out of the thirty-one households in the village, twenty-
[191] five belonged to the men of Ngoni clans. There were nine elderly widows of Ngoni leading families, and of the younger women eighteen were true Ngoni. There was the [] both among the men and the women, and in the senior and younger age-groups, a high proportion of those who were true Ngoni and who practised the Ngoni way of living. It was a village where Ngoni cultural patterns were very much in evidence, and where the school and the church, representing modern developments, were closely integrated with village life.

[162] Emcakateni was just off a main road and as easily acces-
[592] sible as Enkodlweni was remote. It was perched on a hill-top in a commanding position, and was much larger, with a hundred and twenty-two households compared with thirty-one. There were several kraals and many cattle, no tsetse menace, but lions in the neighbourhood which more than once attacked the kraal at night. Outsiders, that is of non-Ngoni clans, who had money, had married into the chief's and other leading families, and these households possessed well-built brick houses. I lived in a grass-and-pole hut inside a fence, near the compound of the big house. There was no school in the village, and the nearest one was run by a mission disliked by the leading Ngoni. The boys spent all their time with the cattle, or hunting or practising crafts.

NGONILAND AND THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN IT

There were musicians and craftsmen there, as at Enkodlweni. All the senior Ngoni men knew Ngoni history, used proverbs in the courts and in conversation, and two or three senior men knew and carried out the ritual of the ancestor cult. The new element in this village was due to economic influences rather than missionary and educational. Most of the men had learned to read and write Nyanja while away at work, but no one knew more than a few words of English, and only one or two of the leading men, and no women, spoke Ngoni. 105
621

The men of the leading Ngoni families formed a closely knit group for purposes of village affairs, social life and ritual performances. There was a group of senior Ngoni women who exerted a powerful influence in all matters concerned with household life and the bringing up of children. But out of a total of one hundred and twenty-one households, only thirty-seven belonged to men of Ngoni clans, and there were only thirty-two women of Ngoni clans including both the older and the younger groups of women. The aristocratic group here was small in comparison with Enkodlweni, but the influence of their ways of living was proportionately much stronger. The Ngoni men and women of leading families were very conscious of their cultural distinction and also of their relatively small numbers, and many were the complaints about 'those other people who are spoiling our land'. [212]
[191]

Political and social changes

When the British took over the administration of Nyasaland between 1891 and 1901, the Ngoni kingdoms received no special recognition. Their chiefs, called by the administration principal village headmen, and their heads of clans called village headmen, were relegated to the same position *sic* as the administration as the local peoples. Part of the Central Ngoni kingdom was cut off from the rest by the treaty demarcating the Nyasaland boundary from Portuguese East Africa. 648
177
[622]
[131]

'A NEW STRANGER HAS COME'

After this formal visit had taken place, the young mother was free to visit her former home more often, and her relatives could come and see her and her baby in her husband's village. 593
574

Taking care of the baby

There were two special features of infant care among the Ngoni which were not found among the neighbouring peoples. One was the assignment of a nurse girl from outside the circle of relatives to care for a new infant. The nurse girl was chosen by the grandmother from among her dependant household staff, and was allotted to one particular baby. The girl, who was usually in her early teens and unmarried, was supervised by an older woman, also of the grandmother's household. This woman watched over the personal behaviour of several nurse girls, as well as seeing that they did their work properly as nurses. 854
357
[592]

The nurse girl took charge of the baby in the early morning and kept it with her all day until nightfall, bringing it back to the mother at more or less regular intervals for suckling. The mother played with the baby if she felt like it, and sent for the nurse girl to bring it to her if strangers came and she wanted to display the child. The Ngoni commended this practice by saying that their women kept clean because they did not carry babies about all day on their backs. They admitted at the same time that many infants grew greatly attached to their nurse girls, to the extent of being happier with them than with their mother. The nurse girls did not take little babies far afield. They stayed around within the fences of the household or near at hand, helping with domestic chores, chatting to other nurse girls, helping to prepare meals, and eating with the baby's mother and anyone else who formed part of the household eating unit. At night, after she had given the baby to its mother, she went off to sleep in the hut of the older woman who was in charge of her and other nurse girls. [281]

IV

Family Life for the Young Child

The women's world

It was the proud boast of the Ngoni aristocrats that their women did no 'work' in the old days. When they spoke this they were equating 'work' with physical labour, sweeping and cleaning in the hut and compound, fetching wood and water, hoeing in the gardens, and the routine part of preparing and cooking food. The Ngoni women of the former large households had an army of 'helpers' to do all these tasks for them. Though the number of helpers dwindled as the larger households disappeared, the pattern of appropriation of tasks remained in the shrunken households, and hence the Ngoni women were always responsible for a high degree of household management. Larger households in the old days fed fifty to sixty people from their cooking-pots, and though when I lived among them the scale of their households was much smaller, some were still feeding twenty and more people for each meal, apart from the occasional meals served when kinsfolk and strangers came unexpectedly.

I never failed to be impressed with the quiet dignified competence with which Ngoni women managed their household affairs. They did it with an apparent effortlessness, which had its roots in long training and tradition, and in an awareness of responsibility that increased, but weighed less heavily, with age and experience. This competence was always apparent on occasions such as wedding feasts. Then cereal food, meat, vegetable relishes were cooked in vast quantities and served out to the separate groups of guests.

CHILDREN OF THEIR FATHERS

562 These skills of management, and of order and dignity in
461 serving, were not however only seen in large-scale operations.

592 The modern young Ngoni wife serving tea and 'scones' to
her husband's guests sitting on his veranda showed the same
qualities of careful preparation and considerate service as
her grandmother had shown presiding over 500 guests at a
wedding feast.

562 Household management in Ngoni homes included pri-
marily managing the household staff, allotting their tasks to
them, settling their quarrels, looking after them when sick,
marrying off the young ones when the time came. In the
all-important aspect of feeding a large household and its
dependents, Ngoni women assumed responsibility for seeing
that there were enough supplies of different kinds of food
at hand, for regular consumption and for emergencies. They
consulted at times with the 'official' who was in charge of
their 'house' about mobilizing supplies or organizing women
helpers to cultivate in the gardens. Most significant in the
eyes of Ngoni and non-Ngoni alike was the task of Ngoni

[264] women of 'dividing the food' at every meal-time. It was a
key concept in Ngoni culture that at all times when food,
beer, or other kinds of goods were to be divided out, and
enjoyed or used by a large number of people, the 'one who
divided' was an important individual. He, or more often
she, must be of 'good character', who assumed, or was given,
the task because he or she knew how to do it, and no one
questioned the justice or the competence with which the
dividing was done. Again I was impressed by the almost
nonchalant air with which Ngoni women ladled out food
for a large number of individuals and groups. It looked
[461] so easy. It was obviously not a simple matter. The results
were always accepted and welcomed, and I never heard any
grumbles.

593 Central to the organization of the household, and in one
592 sense the axis on which it revolved, was the care and atten-
tion the wife gave to her husband. Cooking, including the

FAMILY LIFE FOR THE YOUNG CHILD

choice and variety of food, was primarily to please him, and to meet the incessant claims on his hospitality when visitors came. A well-ordered and harmonious household also pleased him, and conversely the sounds of women quarrelling angered him and violated his canons of accepted Ngoni behaviour. It was his wife's task to supervise the household helpers, who were mostly non-Ngoni, and to make them conform to Ngoni patterns by controlling their rages, instead of yelling at each other and hurling accusations of witchcraft at those with whom they were angry. 593 592 (183) 357 592

Ngoni women also took a serious view of another aspect of pleasing their husbands, namely attention to their person and dress. The old elaborate hair-dressing of Ngoni women, the scrupulous washing of their bodies with sweet-smelling leaves, the use of oil and clarified butter on the skin and hair, and the careful tying and draping of cloths and arranging of bead headbands and necklaces—these all were forms of beauty treatment and personal hygiene designed to please the husband. They also reinforced the self-respect and authority of well-born Ngoni women, marking them out by their well-groomed appearance from the 'workers' and 'helpers' who surrounded them. 562 593 302 515 901 (565)

The young Ngoni child, up to the age of six or seven, grew up in a women's world of the kind just described. His mother was learning from his paternal grandmother the increasing duties and responsibilities of an Ngoni wife, although she was supposed to have learned some of them in her own home from her mother before marriage. We saw in Chapter II how the social horizons of a small Ngoni child were never of a narrow type, restricted to his individual family. The care of a child, especially between the time of weaning and the coming of second teeth, was the concern of a number of women in addition to his own mother, from whom he was snatched away at weaning, and, for a time at least, kept away from her household for eating and sleeping. 602 855 (606)

Among the female population of a village most nearly (561)

VILLAGE LIFE FOR OLDER BROTHERS AND SISTERS

given to giggling and putting their head on one side when asked questions. They took their school work seriously in order to show that they, the Ngoni girls, were the intelligent ones. They were also aware that the number of cattle to be transferred at their marriage would be greater according to whether they finished school in Standard II, III, IV, or even VI. 561
872
565
[583]

Apart from going to school, which was only for the daughters of relatively forward-looking Ngoni fathers, the girls continued to take part in the daily routine of the household. They and their companions, according to their growth and strength and pleasure, did a little pounding, fetching water, grinding grain, roasting ground-nuts. In a large household, where there were many helpers, the daughters of the family only did as much as they felt inclined of the domestic chores. As they said: 'It was like our play.' They spent more time with the young children, or washing themselves and their clothes by the stream. Combing and dressing their hair, rubbing fat or oil on their skin, threading beads, plaiting grass or fibres, learning how to make Ngoni bead designs for head bands or wristlets—all these formed the lighter and more amusing side of the daily routine. 561
857
592
512
[302]
[301]

From among the girls in this exclusive and protected girls' circle, Ngoni girls chose a particular friend, whom they always addressed as 'my friend', even if she were a classificatory sister or cousin. As with the boys in the dormitory this friend was a confidante to whom a girl could talk freely about her life in the compound, her likes and dislikes among the other girls and women, her ideas about suitors and marriage. The friend was always from another compound and of a leading Ngoni clan. The two friends made bracelets and necklets for each other, and went to bathe in the stream together. Sometimes the friendship lasted until the girls were married and separated. At times it broke up suddenly in a violent quarrel. There was however a curious tenacity about these friendship pacts, and they were more often maintained 572

CHILDREN OF THEIR FATHERS

827 gardens was not required of most Ngoni women, though they
577 were expected to know by experience how to hoe and to pound, to mud walls and to clean a house in order to supervise their helpers and to see that household work was done efficiently.

577 In addition to being healthy, the ideal Ngoni woman was
581 always well-groomed. She might lack the facial formation of high cheek-bones, narrow nose and deep-set eyes and the
[826] light bronze colouring which were the accepted standards of beauty. Even without these natural, usually inherited, advantages she spent, as we have seen, much time every day taking care of her skin and hair. When she was receiving
[302] visitors or sitting outside her hut, her two long cloths, one fastened under the armpits and the other over one shoulder and knotted on the chest, were carefully draped and arranged. If she walked to another compound or out of the village on the road, or walked or danced in any ceremony,
[516] her dignity of bearing and poise of head was always marked. She did not hurry, but, as the Ngoni said, 'she walked strongly'. A government official passing an octogenarian
[481] Ngoni princess on the road stopped and offered her a lift in his car. She looked him up and down and said: 'Thank you, young man. I can still walk.'

577 Many references have been made already to the relationship between a wife and her husband, and between a wife,
602 especially a young one, and her husband's relatives. The keynotes of this relationship were devotion to her husband, respect for his relatives, and circumspection in her relations with her co-wives and with her non-Ngoni helpers. Jealousy between co-wives was recognized by the Ngoni but not condoned, and the young wife at marriage was warned by her own family against quarrelling with anyone, co-wives, helpers or in-laws, though the last was almost unthinkable.

577 Competence in household management, being a successful 'châtelaine', made many demands on a Ngoni woman if
● 592 she were to live up to what was considered an ideal house

PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER

wife. We have talked in Chapters IV and VII of her duties 577
 in organizing food supplies, supervising cooking, and that 592 ●
 supreme test of competence: dividing out the food so that
 all had a fair share. The same high standard of skill was [264]
 expected in the general care and supervision of the com-
 pound, the children and the household staff. Ngoni women,
 like their menfolk, were proud of being able to supervise
 other people and organize life around them, to control others
 satisfactorily, to hear complaints and to pacify quarrels. The
 proverb 'The tooth laughs to no purpose', meaning that [538]
 angry people show their teeth but with no merriment, was
 often heard when Ngoni women intervened to stop two
 quarrelling girls or to prevent an irate helper getting angry
 with the nurse girls.

The traits of justice and wisdom were important elements 577
 in the foundation of a Ngoni married woman's reputation.
 These were judged by her ability to allocate fair shares of 538
 food to servants and helpers, and to adjudicate wisely in
 women's disputes. Two proverbs referred particularly to
 dividing out food and were said about women who were either
 careless or stingy, and did not give their helpers a fair share.
 'The finger-nails are surfeited' meant that the important
 people had eaten heartily without thought for others; and
 'She has sliced one side only' had the same connotation,
 that those who had the supplies were keeping too much for
 themselves. Two other proverbs drove home this principle
 of *nehlisa obhile* when emphasizing the responsibilities of
 married women: 'The elephant is not made heavy by its
 trunk,' and 'If the cows do not produce milk the herdsman
 is responsible.'

The ideal personality of Ngoni men

As we have just said, there was a definite personality pattern 577
 for young men whether married or not, which emphasized 562
 special qualities looked for in them, since on the whole they 561
 had relatively little authority or responsibility in village

APPENDIX

- HOUSE, HUT, HOUSEHOLD**, house is used in this book for the Ngoni system of grouping round the leading women who were wives or mothers of the head of the village. Hut is used for the actual building. Household is used for a group of huts within a compound, (See diagrams in Chapter IV. See also Ngoni of Nyasaland page 122). 128
562
592
- PATRILOCAL**), refers to residence of young couple after marriage 591
- MATRILOCAL**), —sometimes called virilocal and uxorilocal.
- CLASSIFICATORY KINSHIP TERMS**, extension of use of father, mother, brother, sister etc. to wide range of relatives. 601
- PARALLEL COUSINS**, children of father's brothers or mother's sisters—regarded as brothers and sisters and called such.
- CROSS COUSINS**, children of father's sisters or mother's brothers— with whom marriage was possible. [582]
- AGE-SETS**, the special Ngoni terms are given in 'Ngoni of Nyasaland' page 144. 561
104
- all children: *abantwana*
- young men: *amajaha*
- young girls before puberty: *inkakazana*
- young girls after puberty: *izintombi*

III

VERNACULAR TERMS

- AKULU** the important people 104
- ALEZI** nursemaids
- GOGO** grandparent or any very senior person
- HLONIPA** respect
- INDLUNKULU** chief hut in a village
- INDUNA** official in village
- IZIDANDANI** girl attendants
- LAWENI** boys' dormitory
- MWINI** owner—of a hut, cattle, dance group

[P.1]

CHAPTER I

MARRIAGE IN THE TIME OF PEACE

1. *The old social structure*

IN THE DAYS before the European conquest, the Ngoni people lived in large villages each containing hundreds of huts built round a central cattle byre. Each married woman had her own hut and there were separate dormitories for boys and for girls. The huts were grouped into small clusters, each containing the dwellings of a few close agnates with their wives and children under the leadership of the senior male agnate. If the leader of the cluster was an important person, captives taken in war were allocated to him and their huts were included in his own cluster. Clusters were grouped into divisions, each usually under the control of a village lieutenant. Within the same division the heads of clusters were either agnates of the lieutenant or were people who had been captured by him or his father or who had been allocated to him by the chief and who were therefore bound to him as quasi-kinsmen. Several divisions made up a village under a headman or a regional governor. The village lieutenants were dependents or former captives of the headman or his ancestors, and were allocated to their divisions by him. Some divisions were under the control of junior kinsmen of the headman. Each village was attached to a royal headquarters where there was a senior queen. This arrangement of clusters, divisions, villages, and royal headquarters, which I refer to as the residential system, seems to have been similar to that found to-day among the Swazi.¹

The system was a growing one. Brothers brought up in the same cluster gradually achieved their independence and split off to establish clusters of their own. The heads of clusters grew in importance and were promoted to village lieutenants so that their clusters became divisions, while divisions grew too large to be contained within the villages and moved off to establish themselves as separate villages. This process of expansion did not in itself affect the formal hierarchy of authority. The lieutenant who established his own village as a distinct spatial entity still remained a lieutenant of his lord, and deferred to him in matters of importance. The same word² was used to refer to a division of a royal headquarters, a division of a village, and a cluster within a division. The relationships of superordination and subordination between persons remained the same despite changes in spatial separation.

¹ Cf. Kuper, *An African Aristocracy*, p. 66.

² *Cigama*, pl. *sigama*, from *ku-gama*, to divide.

643 The chief did however interfere to some extent in the marriages of those near him and on occasion took away a wife from one man and gave her as wife to another. Nsingu, the heir of Mpezeni I, once took a wife from one of the important men in his mother's royal village and made her his queen. [762] The man committed suicide and Nsingu killed a beast to placate the anger of his mother's lieutenants. Such instances of intervention seem to have been rare and were disliked by the common people.

6. Polygyny

592 The pattern of growth of the residential system was determined by the grouping of children in the compound family. This grouping was in turn determined by the ranking of wives. It seems that the South-Eastern Bantu system of dividing wives into three groups, 595 a great house and a left- and a right-hand house was not continued. [171] Old men are agreed that in the past wives could be described as either left-hand or right-hand, but there is no agreement on the principles of this division. In discussing the wives of well-known men who flourished about this period, there was no consensus about which women were left-hand wives and which were right. The division cannot in any case have had the same spatial reference to the husband's cattle byre as among the South-Eastern Bantu, [361] since the Ngoni lived in large villages with a central byre containing all the cattle of the village.

595 Wives were arranged into small groups which we may term 'bands'. A band might contain up to a dozen co-wives and was 592 under the charge of its senior member. Wives in a band lived close to each other in the same cluster of huts. A man might have as many as five or six bands of wives, and the senior wife of one of the bands was the man's great wife, the mother of his heir. We have seen that a cross-cousin was inferior to an unrelated wife, and a wife from the same or related village inferior to one from afar. These two considerations, however, seem only to have influenced a man's choice of senior wives and did not themselves directly determine wifely rank. Thus a man could if he wished make a cross-cousin from his own village his great wife or the senior wife of one of his bands, but most men did not do so. The first wife married with bridewealth was the great wife. If there was a wife married earlier for whom no bridewealth had been paid, perhaps a cross-cousin or a recently captured woman, then she became subordinate to the chief wife and was regarded as a member of her band. Wives married subsequently were attached to this band until the husband decided to start another band. He took either one of the wives of his great wife's band or else a newly acquired wife, and established a new cluster of huts for her. Some other members of the great wife's band might be transferred to the new band, as subordinates of the newly promoted wife. As the man continued to take new wives they were allocated to one or other of the existing bands. If the husband was an important man he allocated to each

band one or more of his lieutenants and other dependent families. Thus the band of wives formed the core round which the sub-segments of the husband's residential segment were built up. Each band was associated with a distinct cluster of huts, although not every cluster of huts had a band of wives living in it. The division of wives into bands was only one of the processes by which the segmentation of clusters was carried on.

Each linked co-wife lived in the band of her barren senior although occasionally a linked co-wife was promoted and made head of her own band. The children of a linked co-wife were spoken of as being born in the house of her senior, but here the word 'house' (*ng'anda*) was used only in a figurative sense.²¹ Where it was necessary to contrast the children of the wives of one band with the children of another, they were called the children of the head of the band. Less frequently all a man's children by his several wives were referred to as the children of the house of his great wife.

It seems that more trouble was taken to obtain a linked co-wife for a barren great wife or head of a band than for a junior wife. A great wife needed children to ratify her position in the hierarchy of co-wives, and to establish a line of descendents senior to the lines springing from her subordinates. Barrenness was the principal reason for seeking a linked co-wife but it is said that if a man had pleased his wife's father, a linked co-wife might be given spontaneously by his father-in-law as a mark of his esteem. When a wife grew old and needed domestic help a linked co-wife was sometimes given to her although she might have borne many children. A man was under an obligation to offer one beast²² to his wife's father when he received a linked co-wife.

The children of a linked co-wife ranked immediately after the children by her senior, if there were any. They inherited the property allocated to her hut and belonged to the segment founded by her.

7. The levirate

The custom of linking co-wives was sometimes a kind of sororal polygyny and sometimes a variety of sororate. We may see it as a device for establishing and maintaining the residential segment potentially founded by the senior co-wife when she married her husband. Similarly we may look on the levirate as a way of ensuring that the fertility of the woman still remained attached to that same segment even after the death of her husband. A widow lived in leviratic marriage with her husband's younger brother who became

²¹ Compare the similar use of the word 'house' among the Zulu and 'room' among the Tallensi. Cf. Hoernlé, 'Social organization' in *The Bantu-speaking Tribes of South Africa*, p. 78, and Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi*, pp. 198 sqq.

²² Called variously *mecha* or *mtoso*. *Mecha* is an Nsenga word meaning a small cloth worn round the waist by women. The allusion is to the labour pains felt by the mother of the new bride which were eased by binding her waist with a cloth. *Mtoso* has the same meaning in the old Ngoni language.

made with the approval of the dead man's kin. Although by this arrangement the woman was for a while removed from her allotted place in the system, the *status quo ante* was restored with the return of the children to their pater's kinsmen. 587 [857]

8. Segmentation

The primary cleavage among a man's children was between the children of one band and the children of another. Within a band, the division was into separate 'houses'. Where there were children of more than one mother in the same 'house', that is where the senior wife as well as the linked wife had borne children or where there was more than one fertile linked co-wife with the same senior, the division was between the groups of full siblings. These lines of cleavage were expressed spatially by the arrangements of the huts belonging to each segment. At the top of the political hierarchy, the arrangement of the Paramount Chief's queens determined the major divisions into which the nation was split residentially, with a senior queen in charge of each major royal village, and lesser queens in charge of politically dependent royal villages. At the bottom, the man with two or three wives saw his sons group themselves round their mothers while retaining a common allegiance to him. 595 592 644 631 593

Thus we see that in 'the time of peace' marriage was tied to a clear-cut residential system based on patrilineal descent and virilocal residence, modified by political status deriving ultimately from the Paramount Chief. The position of males in this system was determinate, although not unalterable. By the processes of marriage males were supplied with legitimate offspring. Although descent and succession were traced through males, the pattern of segmentation of this patrilineal system was determined by the organization of wives. The relative status of co-wives was perpetuated in the relationship between the segments which sprang from them. 182 562

In this system the elementary family of man, wife, and children did not emerge as an important grouping. In all serious enterprises a person derived support from his male agnates, and it was to the organized kin that the fertility of the woman was transferred by the payment of bridewealth. By the time a man had advanced in status sufficiently to be head of a division or a village, he had acquired many dependants who were not true kinsmen and his wives had been divided into bands. With the recently captured families, these considerations did not apply with quite the same force, for there were many poor men who had only one wife. These people depended on their political superior for cattle, and the women were to some extent under the control of his great wife, in so far as agricultural work and beer brewing were concerned. Even the rearing of children once they had been weaned was carried on outside the elementary family. Children were sent to their grandmother's house to be trained and indoctrinated with Ngoni values. The recent captives 594 613 554 855 [569] [603] ORD

Administrative ruling that no new village could be started without a minimum of ten taxpayers, and earlier it was the policy of the Administration to decrease the number of independent villages. These policies have now changed, and throughout the period there have always been devices for lessening their effect, but it is still true that sometimes the easiest way for a man to flee from his kinsmen is to build his hut in his wife's village.

648
361
591

Case history 14

Samuel's father was headman of a village. Samuel¹⁴ married in the village and had four sons by his wife before she died. His second wife lived with him virilocally and after she had borne two children she committed adultery with one of Samuel's elder brothers. Samuel divorced her and married a third wife who died soon after. Samuel accused his brothers of killing his first and third wives by sorcery. He married a fourth wife and went to live in her village, taking with him his four sons by his first wife and the elder child by his second wife. He is still registered at his father's village and attends there whenever the District Officer tours the area, but he has little to do with his brothers.

[154]

In this way the movements of men and women between villages reflect the struggles between kinsfolk and between affines. Besides the formation of new villages, which goes on despite obstacles placed in the way, there is a continual reshuffling of the elements making up the existing villages. Through marriage a man acquires affines and through them places where he can live if he wants to do so. This change in the structure of the village is therefore related to the new role of village in the administrative scheme, the new rules for their formation, and the new kinds of movement from one village to another. By reason of his marriages the number of moves that a man can make if need be is increased.

591
621

[178]

3. Polygyny

The other important structural change that has been directly related to external influences is the decreased incidence of polygyny. In the old days a man acquired dependants in two ways, by begetting them and by capturing them. Wealth consisted of cattle and dependants, and the well-remembered names of the past are those of patriarchs with dozens of wives whose offspring now form the core of many villages. Nowadays the missions oppose polygyny, wealth can be acquired in other ways than by the marriage of daughters, and a variety of relatives with different genealogical ties can be gathered round one as dependants. It is rare to find a man with as many as five wives. With the decline in polygyny the system of ranking that was used to organize large compound households has fallen into decay, and except when the issue has been complicated by the payment of bridewealth, wives are simply ranked in chronological order of marriage. With the increased importance

595
178
[556]

[554]
[592]

¹⁴ See genealogy, p. 81.

life as a young girl. She gives the half-pounded maize to the bride-585
groom's mother.

In neither of the two ceremonies I saw did the husband play any large part. He did not appear when his bride was instructed. His father sent word to him that all was going well, but he himself stayed out of the way at the other end of the village. Sometimes, however, the bridegroom does sit with his bride on the mat and is instructed with her.

Another gall bladder ceremony which I recorded was held at the time the bride went to live with her husband. This was in an intra-village marriage. In the evening the bride came with important women from her section of the village. The bridegroom's relatives were waiting to receive them, and promised to give them a beast. The bride was then handed over to them. The women went back to their own division, and returned the next day to claim the beast and wash the bride. The beast, an ox, was killed and the intestines were placed round the neck of a younger sister of the bride who became the designated linked co-wife. [231]

If Christians hold the gall bladder ceremony before the bride begins to live with her husband, it is followed by a ceremony in church. The bride does not come back to live with her husband after the gall bladder ceremony but instead goes with her relatives to the local church, where they meet a party from the man's village, and the arrangements for the marriage are set in hand. After three weeks the couple are married in church. The bride then goes back again to her village and as before she pounds flour. After a few days she comes to live with her husband, or he comes to live with her.

Appendix II

FIRST COOKING

When a woman begins her marriage in her husband's village, 592
she cannot cook food until she has been invited to do so by her 252
husband's parents. Until then, she relies on food cooked by her 593
co-wives or her mother-in-law or grandmother-in-law. This state of affairs may last from a month up to a year. It is ended by the ceremony of 'making to cook' (*mphakiso*). I did not see this ceremony, and I have relied on the accounts of informants. It is said that a man's parents would be ashamed of their poverty if they did not entertain the new bride as a guest until the time had come for her to join in the general run of domestic work in the village.

The man's parents decide when the ceremony shall be held. On the day, the man's sisters, mothers and grandmothers prepare flour, plates, porridge pat and stirring stick in the house of the man's

592 mother. One of the man's sisters conducts the wife to her mother-
252 in-law's hut, and under the instruction of the assembled women
593 she begins to cook. Although people speak of her doing the cooking,
[262] in practice all she does is to look on while her sisters-in-law do
the work. The porridge is divided onto plates and distributed under
the directions of the man's mother. One plate is sent to the man's
father, one to the husband who eats the porridge with his brothers,
and one to the most important woman in the village, while some are
taken by the cooks themselves. The man's father is expected to
remark on how well the porridge has been cooked, but he may say
that it has been poorly prepared and his daughter-in-law must be
taught again. This expression of disapproval cannot be more than
a way of showing his dislike for his daughter-in-law for whatever
he says the ceremony is not repeated and the woman begins to cook
regularly for her husband. If the man's relatives are wealthy, they
may kill a goat or a sheep on this occasion, or the woman's parents
may send a sheep or a goat to be killed and eaten. The woman's
parents cannot themselves attend the ceremony.

[91] If the couple begin their marriage uxorilocally this ceremony
does not take place. The bride begins to cook for her husband as
soon as he comes to live with her, using her grand-mother's hut as a
kitchen.

Appendix III

THE HOEING PARTY

606 A man is under an obligation to provide once during his marriage
583 a party of hoers who work in his wife's mother's garden for the
greater part of one day and who are rewarded by his wife's father.
This party is called by the general word for obligations owed by a
man towards his parents-in-law, *cikomwene*.¹ The function of this
occasion, as a socially sanctioned method of expression of hostility
between a man and his affines, has already been discussed. I
attended one of these parties and my clerk attended two others.

The man, or a relative of his, tells his father that he is planning
to bring a party to hoe on such and such a day. If the father-in-law
agrees that the day is suitable he tells his wife to brew beer for the
hoers. On the agreed day the hoeing party arrive early in the
morning and begin to work in the garden. The father-in-law promises
presents to the leader of the hoers, who continue to hoe until they
are offered what they consider is sufficient. They then stop, and
go to the village to receive the present and drink beer.

¹ See above, p. 74.

THE FORT JAMESON NGONI

422 Mpezeni is the owner of the land, or of the world. The cattle kept in
231 the royal villages are held to have belonged formerly to Mpezeni I or
643 to Zwangendaba, and therefore still belong to the Paramount Chief.
Chiefs and other members of the royal lineage who have cattle inherited in this way, in fact dispose of them as they please when the Paramount Chief is not in their village, but if he appears and a beast is killed in his honour, it is the Paramount who is praised as the owner of the beast and not the local owner. In the capital and chief's villages the lieutenants are more under the control of the chief of the county, who may intervene to depose a lieutenant if he thinks that his cattle are not being well looked after.

622 The Administration does not distinguish between one type of village and another, and gives the same title of headman¹ to the man in charge of the village, whoever he may be. It tends to act on the
621 assumption that all headmen are of equal status and have the same
648 amount of authority in their villages. Combined with the decline in the power of the royal lineage, this policy may lead to the assimilation of the different types of village to a common form.

II. THE VILLAGE

Material Setting

361 Ngoni villages, which form the principal units of administration in the country, contain from half a dozen to 120 huts. It is seldom more than a quarter of a mile from one edge of a village to the other. There is a rough arrangement of huts into parallel lines, with the doors all facing the same way at right-angles to the direction of the lines. Kitchen huts, which are similar in appearance to dwelling huts,
[343] are included in these lines, while in front of a line of dwellings may be a line of storehouses and sties for small stock. On the edge of the
[417] village are the cattle byres. There are seldom any fences marking off courtyards within the village, so that it is possible to sit on the veranda of a hut and look along at all the other verandas. If there are well-established divisions within the village, the boundaries of the divisions may be indicated by lines of aloes.

● 592 Most people, except polygynists and some children, may be said to live in one hut, in which they keep most of their belongings and where they usually sleep. A single hut may be occupied by up to about ten

¹ Usually *hahimane*, pl. *mahahimane*; otherwise *afumbe yomazani*, pl. *mafumbe amazani*. The specific term for headman of a cadet or commoner village is *amafumbe*.

THE VILLAGE

my

children, but it is unusual to find more than two adults living in the same hut. These may be either man and wife, or two women who are unmarried or whose husbands are away. Adolescent boys sleep in dormitories containing a number of boys, and there are similar huts for girls. Smaller children sleep with whoever is responsible for their upbringing, parents, grandparents, or other relative, as the case may be. Children in fact sleep in a variety of huts, sometimes with their elders and sometimes with one group of playmates, sometimes with another. Polygynists divide their time between their several wives, although they may tend to keep their belongings in the hut of their chief wife. Men do not as a rule possess huts of their own apart from those of their wives.

The hut is said to belong to the man or woman living in it. There is a tendency to refer to the man as the owner if the marriage is patrilocal and to the woman if it is matrilocal, but this is not an invariable rule, and the builder of the hut, who may be living elsewhere, may be referred to as the owner. About half the dwelling huts have kitchens near by, separate huts of similar construction which are used for cooking and as sleeping-places for children and visitors. When there is no separate kitchen, cooking is done inside the dwelling hut or on the veranda.

The village, then, is a collection of buildings of different types, in which people sleep and keep their possessions, animals are sheltered, and food stored. We must now consider how the inhabitants of the village are organized.

Structure

Royal villages have names in the Ngoni language that were given by their founders. For example, there is a royal village founded by Singu, the eldest son of Mpezeni I, called Ngalewani, meaning 'dormitory', as it was there that he put his wives. These villages are also sometimes referred to by the name of the senior queen for whom they were founded.

Most commoner villages, however, do not possess names of this type, and are known only by descent-names or by the names of individuals. These are usually the name and descent-name of the founder of the village, the man who first established the village as a separate unit. It is this individual name that is used to refer to the present headman of the village, the man recognized by the chief and the Administration as responsible for the village. This office is hereditary,

592 ●

[882]

[858]

[595]

423

342

[343]

[252]

621

621

103

621

622

[103]

342 /5 cont'd/ WITH both bamboo and pole huts, The
[342] construction of the walls and roof is the work of men, while women
are responsible for plastering walls, floor and verandah, and for col-
lecting the grass for the roof. Pole huts are more often than not
plastered on the outside as well as on the inside of the /6/ wall, and
[343] women like to make designs on them in plasters of different colour,
with inscriptions and drawings.

The favourite time for hut building is from June to September,
[344] when there is comparatively little work to do in the gardens. A man
may undertake the major part of the work himself, but if his wife is
co-operative and brews beer, he will also get his friends to come and
[345] help him, as a working party. Perhaps fifteen or twenty people will
come, the men cutting and carrying poles and fixing them in place,
the women bringing grass for thatching. If many people attend, then
the walls will be put up, and the thatching started, but if the friends
are few, then the beer will be finished while the roof of the house is
still not thatched, and the owner will have to finish the work himself.
[346] In any case, he will need to offer at a later date, either more beer,
or salt, or meat, or sometimes money, to women to come and
plaster the walls and floor. Building may however be an operation
spread over many months, and if the work is started late in the season,
the rains may come before the roof is on. In this case, the building
may be left until the following year, when there is again time to
spare for building, and good supplies of thatching grass are available.
Alternatively, the owner may become discouraged, and use the poles
for firewood. A well-built pole hut will last five years and a bamboo
hut longer.

343 Storehouses are built of bamboo or of thick grass, and are
sometimes plastered. They have a detachable roof that acts as a lid,
and the whole construction is built on a plastered platform about two
feet off the ground. Separate storehouses are used for each household
and for different crops, maize, finger millet, kaffir-corn and ground-
nuts. If a man has two maize gardens, he may keep the produce in
[344] separate storehouses. Unmarried and newlywed persons store with
their parents. Storehouses last two or three years.